

National Arborist Association

Fax: 1-603-672-2613
Route 101, PO Box 1094
Amherst, NH 03031-1094

Contact: Sachin Mohan
Public Relations Director
1-800-733-2622



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If your tree could only talk!

Even though trees can't talk, they exhibit many signs that can tell you how they feel. Early to mid-Summer is an especially good time to "read your trees." Here are some tree characteristics you'll want to look for:

Color of the leaves

- Off-color leaves may be an indication of a nutrient deficiency in the soil, or they may be a sign that, for some reason, the tree's root system is incapable of extracting the necessary nutrients. The pattern of discoloration can be important. For instance, iron chlorosis causes progressive yellowing of newly emerging leaves in oaks and other species. Nitrogen deficiency also causes yellowing, but affects the oldest leaves the most.
- Certain trees are susceptible to diseases that cause a distinctive change of leaf color.
- Premature fall coloration during the summer is generally an indication of a problem below ground that is creating stress conditions for the tree.

Misshapen leaves

- An upward curling of the leaf margin - kind of a cupping effect - is the classic symptom of damage from herbicides. Has your lawn, or a neighbor's, been sprayed for weeds recently?
- Distorted leaves may be evidence of sucking insect damage, or the presence of a disease organism. Distorted leaves with brown, necrotic (dead) tissue could mean the tree has anthracnose, a problem in many areas this year.

Thinness of the canopy

Typically, when the uppermost part of the tree's canopy begins to thin, the condition is characterized as decline. However, decline can have several causes, sometimes acting in combination, that are treatable.

- Does your tree look like a telephone pole - that is straight - where it enters the ground, or does it have a natural root flair? The combination of thin crown and telephone pole appearance usually indicate that the tree's roots have been covered with fill. Have a professional evaluate the tree's chances and prescribe treatment.
- Has there been any construction activity near your tree in the past 2-5 years? Construction damage to the tree root system can take several years to show up, and often is serious.
- The combination of thin crown and flat trunk on one side are the symptoms of a root that is literally strangling the tree.
- Thinness of branches on the inside of the tree canopy may simply mean that interior branches are being shaded. The tree may benefit from proper pruning.

No leaves, or losing leaves

- If your favorite tree has failed to produce leaves this season, you have reason to be concerned. Sometimes, quick action may be required to keep a serious problem from spreading.
- If your tree loses all or most of its leaves during the growing season, get professional advice immediately! This may be a sign of a very serious disease or a leaf-eating insect. Either way, trees cannot survive for long without foliage.

If you are unsure about your tree's health, consult a professional arborist who will identify and remove hazards as well as treat the causes of tree health problems. You can provide important clues by telling the arborist everything you have observed about your tree that you consider unusual. You can find an NAA member arborist close to you by calling the National Arborist Association, 1-800-733-2622, or by a zip code search on the NAA's Web Site: <http://www.natlarb.com>